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CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

Caroline, crimson with mortification, protested indignantly.

"Mr. Sylvester," she said, "it is not necessary to—"

"Excuse me"—her uncle's tone was sharper and more stern—"I think it is, Go on, Sylvester."

The lawyer looked far from comfortable, but he spoke at once and to the point.

"I should have told you and your son just this, Mrs. Dunn," he said. "I intimated it before, and Miss Warren had already written you the essential facts. A new and unexpected development, the nature of which I am not at liberty to disclose now or later, makes Abijah Warren's estate absolutely bankrupt—not only that, but many thousands of dollars in debt. His heirs are left penniless."

It was blunt, beyond doubt. Even Captain Elisha winced at the word "penniless." Caroline, aching, put a hand on the table to steady herself.

"Thank you, Mr. Sylvester," said the captain quietly. "I'll see you again in a few moments."

The lawyer bowed and left the room, evidently glad to escape. Captain Elisha turned to Mrs. Dunn.

"And now, ma'am," he observed, "that part of the business is over. My niece is a poor girl. She needs somebody to support her and look out for her. She's got that somebody, we're all thankful to say. She's engaged to Mr. Malcolm here. I understand from Steve that Malcolm's been mighty anxious to have the wedding hurried along. I can't say as I blame him. And I think the sooner they're married the better. Now, how soon can we make it, Mrs. Dunn?"

Caroline gazed at her guardian in horrified amazement. "Why?" she cried. "You—you—What do you mean by such?"

"Don't be an idiot, Caro," cut in her brother. "I told you to be sensible. Captain Warren's dead right."

"Steve, you stay out of this." There was no misunderstanding the captain's tone. "When I want your opinion I'll ask for it. And, Caroline, I want you to stay out too. This is my trick at the wheel. Mrs. Dunn, what d'you say? Never mind the young folks. You and me know that marriage is business, same as everything else. How soon can we have the wedding?"

Mrs. Dunn had apparently nothing to say—to him. She addressed her next remark to Caroline.

"My dear," she said, in great agitation, "this is really too dreadful. This—er—guardian of yours appears to think he is in some barbarous country—savages about. Come, Malcolm, take her away."

"No," Captain Elisha stepped in front of the door. "She ain't goin' and I'd rather you wouldn't go yet. Let's settle this up now. Well, Mr. Dunn," turning to the groom to be, "you're one of the interested parties—what do you say?"

Malcolm ground his heel into the rug. "I don't consider it your business," he declared. "You're butting in where"—

"No, no, I ain't. It's my business, and business is just what it is. There's a business contract between you and my niece. We want to know how soon it can be carried out, that's all."

The young man looked desperately at the door, but the captain's broad shoulders blocked the way toward it. He hesitated, scowled, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, surrendered.

"How can I marry?" he demanded suddenly. "Confound it! My salary ain't large enough to pay my own way decently."

"Malcolm!" cried his mother warningly.

"Well, mater, what the devil's the use of all this? You know—By Jove, you ought to!"

"Hold on, young feller! I don't understand. Your wages ain't large enough, you say? What do you mean? You was goin' to be married, wasn't you? Caroline, don't you say a word. You say—you"—addressing Malcolm—"that you can't support a wife on your wages. You could scrape along, couldn't you? Hey? Couldn't you?"

Malcolm's answer was another scornful shrug. "You belong on Cape Cod," he sneered. "Mater, let's get out of this."

"Wait! Put it plain now. Do I understand that you cal'late to break the engagement because my niece has lost her money? Is that it?"

"This is ridiculous," Mrs. Dunn proclaimed. "Every sane person knows, though barbarians may not—with a venomous glare at the captain—"that in engagements of the kind in which my son has shared a certain amount of—er—financial—er—that is, the bride is supposed to have some money. It is expected. Of course it is! Love in a cottage is—well, a bit passe. My son and I pity your niece from the bottom of our hearts, but—there! Under the circumstances the whole affair be-

comes impossible. Caroline, my dear, I'm dreadfully sorry, dreadfully! I love you like my own child. And poor Malcolm will be heartbroken—but—you see."

Stephen, who had been fuming and repressing his rage with difficulty during the scene, leaped forward with brandished fist.

"By gad!" he shouted. "Mal Dunn, you cad!"

His uncle pushed him back with a sweep of his arm.

"Steve," he ordered, "I'm runnin' this ship." He gave a quick glance at his piece and then added, speaking rapidly and addressing the head of the Dunn family: "I see, ma'am. Yes, yes, I see. Well, you've forgot one thing, I guess. If there's nothin' in marriage but business, then an engagement is what I just called it, a business contract, and it can't be broke without the consent of both sides. You wanted Caroline's money; maybe she wants yours now. If she does, and there's such a thing as law, why, perhaps she can get it."

"That's the talk!" cried Stephen exultingly.

"Stop!" Caroline cried wildly. "Oh, stop! Do you think—do you suppose I would marry him now—now, after I've seen what he is? Oh," with a shudder of disgust, "when I think what I might have done I—Thank God that the money has gone! I'm glad I'm poor! I'm glad I never want to see him or think of him again. Please, please let me go! Oh, take me home! Captain Warren, please let me go home!"

Her uncle was at her side in a moment. "Yes, yes, dearie," he said, "I'll take you home. Don't give way now! I'll—"

He would have taken her arm, but she shrank from him.

"Not you," she begged. "Steve!"

The captain's face clouded, but he answered promptly.

"Of course—Steve," he agreed. "Steve, take your sister home. Mr. Sylvester's got a carriage waitin', and he'll go with you, I don't doubt. Do as I tell you, boy—and behave yourself. Don't wait; go!"

He held the door open until the hysterical girl and her brother had departed. Then he turned to the Duns.

"Well, ma'am," he said dryly, "I don't know's there's anything more to be said. All the questions seem to be settled. Our acquaintance wasn't so awful long, but it was interestin'. Knowin' you has been, as the feller said, a liberal education. Don't let me keep you any longer. Good afternoon."

Then Mrs. Dunn bethought herself of a way to make their exit less awkward and embarrassing.

"My heart!" she said, gasping and with a clutch at her breast. "My poor heart! I—I fear I'm going to have one of my attacks. Malcolm, your arm—quick!"

With an expression of intense but patient suffering and leaning heavily upon her son's arm she moved past Captain Elisha and from the room.

That evening the captain stood in the lower hall of the apartment house at Central Park West undecided what to do next. He wished more than any-



"My heart!" she said, gasping.

thing else in the world to go to his niece. He would have gone to her before—had been dying to go to soothe, to comfort, to tell her of his love—but he was afraid. His conscience troubled him. Perhaps he had been too brutal.

The elevator descended, the door of the cage opened, and Stephen himself darted out. The captain caught him as he passed.

"Here, boy!" he exclaimed. "Where's the fire? Where are you bound?"

His nephew, brought thus unexpectedly to a halt, stared at him.

"Oh, it's you!" he exclaimed. "Humph! I'm bound—I don't know where I'm bound. I'm going to the club, I guess, or somewhere. Anyhow I won't stay with her. I told her so. Silly little idiot! I'll never speak to her again. I told her so. She!"

"Here! Belay! Stop! Who are you talking about?"

"Caro, of course. She!"

"You've run off and left her alone—tonight? Where is she?"

"Upstairs—and crying, I suppose. She doesn't do anything else. It's all she's good for. Selfish, romantic!"

He got no further, for Captain Elisha sent him reeling with a push and ran to the elevator.

"Eight floor," he commanded. The door of the apartment was not latched. Stephen, in his rage and hurry, had neglected such trifles. The captain opened it quietly and walked in. He entered the library. Caroline was lying on the couch, her head buried in the pillows.

"Caroline, dearie," he faltered, "forgive me for comin' here, won't you? I had to come. I couldn't rest, thinkin' of you alone in your trouble. I know you must feel harder than ever toward me for this afternoon's doin's, but I meant it for the best. I had to show you—don't you see? Won't you try to forgive the old feller that loves you more'n all the world? Won't you try?"

"I forgive you?" she repeated incredulously.

"Yes. Try to, dearie. Oh, if you would only believe I meant it for your good and nothin' else! If you could only just trust me and come to me and let me help you. I want you, my girl, I want you!"

She leaned forward. "Do you really mean it?" she cried. "How can you, after all I've done, after the way I've treated you and the things I've said? You must hate me. Every one does. I hate myself. You can't forgive me! You can't!"

His answer was to hold out his arms. Another moment and she was in them, clinging to his wet coat, sobbing, holding him fast and begging him not to leave her, to take her away; that she would work, that she would not be a burden to him—only take her with him and try to forgive her, for he was real and honest and the only friend she had.

And Captain Elisha, soothing her, stroking her hair and murmuring words of love and tenderness, realized that his labor and sacrifice had not been in vain; that there was his recompense—she would never misunderstand him again; she was his at last.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Rejection.

WHEN the apartment was given up and Captain Elisha and his wards moved to the little house in Westchester county, Annie came with them. Mrs. Moriarty came once a week to do the laundry work. Caroline acted as a sort of inexperienced, but willing, supervising housekeeper.

The house had been procured through the kind interest of Sylvester. Caroline took a domestic science course at a university. She could not quite understand how her uncle retained the valuable paintings of their old home. One day at her request her uncle told her the true story of Mr. Pearson's relations with her father. Caroline wrote to Pearson apologizing for her conduct, but she got her uncle's promise not to invite Pearson to call. However, the captain forgot all about it, and Pearson appeared. As he turned in at the front walk Caroline came out of the door. They met face to face.

It was a most embarrassing situation, particularly for Caroline, yet, with feminine resourcefulness, she dissembled her embarrassment to some extent and acknowledged his stammered "Good afternoon, Miss Warren," with a cool, almost cold, "How do you do, Mr. Pearson?" which chilled his pleasure at seeing her and made him wish devoutly that he had not been such a fool as to come. However, there he was, and he hastily explained his presence by telling her of the captain's invitation for that day, how he had expected to meet him at the station and, not meeting him, had walked up to the house.

"Is he in?" he asked.

No, Captain Elisha was not in. He had gone to see a sailboat man. Not hearing from his friend, he concluded the latter would not come until the next day. "He will be so sorry," said Caroline.

He was turning to go, but she stopped him.

"You mustn't go, Mr. Pearson," she said. "You must come in and wait. Captain Warren will be back soon, I'm sure."

Pearson was reluctant, but he could think of no reasonable excuse. So he entered the house, removed his overcoat and hat and seated himself in the living room to await the captain's return.

They were deep in the discussion of the novel when Captain Elisha walked into the living room. He was surprised, stating his feelings at their mildest, to find them together, but he did not express his astonishment. Pearson did not take the next train nor the next. Instead, he stayed for dinner and well into the evening, and when he did go it was after a prompt acceptance of the captain's invitation to "come again in a mighty little while."

Pearson came again a week later and thereafter frequently. The sessions with Cap'n Jim, the hero of the novel, and his associates were once more regular happenings, to be looked forward to and enjoyed by the three.

In June two very important events took place. The novel was finished, and Stephen, his sophomore year at an end, came home from college. He had been invited by some classmates to spend a part of his vacation with them on the Maine coast, and his guardian had consented to his doing so. But

the boy himself had something else to propose.

"Say," he said, "I've been thinking a good deal while I've been away this last time. Now, the way I look at it, this college course of mine isn't worth while. And the kind of work I want to do doesn't need university training. I want to be down on the street, as the governor was. If this rubber company business hadn't knocked us out I intended as soon as I was of age to take that seat of his and start in for myself. Well, that chance has gone, but I mean to get in some way, though I have to start at the foot of the ladder. Now, why can't I leave college and start now? It will be two years gained, won't it?"

Captain Elisha seemed pleased, but he shook his head.

"How do you know you'd like it?" he asked. "You've never tried."

"No, I never have, but I'll like it, all right. I know I shall. It's what I've wanted to do ever since I was old enough to think of such things. Just let me start in now, right away, and I'll show you. I'll make good, you see if I don't."

That evening the captain made a definite proposal to Stephen. It was briefly that, while not consenting to the latter's leaving college, he did consider that a trial of the work in a broker's office might be a good thing. Therefore if the young man wished he could enter the employ of a friend of Sylvester and remain during July and August.

The novel, the wonderful tale which Captain Elisha was certain would



They Met Face to Face.

make its author famous, was finished that very day in June when Stephen came back from New Haven.

The advance copy, the first one, was ready early in September, and the author, of course, brought it immediately to his friends. They found the dedication especially interesting. "To C. W. and E. W., consulting specialists at the literary clinics, with grateful acknowledgments." Probably Captain Elisha was never prouder of anything, even his first command, than of that dedication.

And the story, when at last it appeared for sale, was almost from the beginning a success, and, most important of all perhaps, it sold and continued to sell. There was something in it, its humanity, its simplicity, its clearly marked characters, which made a hit. Pearson no longer needed to seek publishers; they sought him. His short stories were bid for by the magazines, and his prices climbed and climbed. He found himself suddenly planted in the middle of the highway to prosperity.

The novel being out of the way and its successor not yet far enough advanced in plot or general plan for much discussion, the "literary clinics" were no longer as frequent. But Pearson's visits to the Warren house were not discontinued. All summer long he had been coming out once and usually twice a week. Captain Elisha had told him not to stand on formality, to come any time, and he did. On most of these occasions he found the captain at home, but if only Caroline was there he seemed quite contented. The captain was planning a glorious Thanksgiving. At least it would be glorious to him, for he intended spending the day and several days at his own home in South Denboro. He would not leave Caroline, of course; she was going with him. Steve would be there, though he would not come until Thanksgiving day itself. Sylvester also would be of the party. He seemed delighted at the opportunity. Pearson was asked and had accepted. His going was so far a settled thing that he had commissioned Captain Elisha to purchase a stateroom for him on the Fall river boat, for, of course, the captain would not consider their traveling the entire distance by train. A day or two later Pearson announced that he had decided not to go.

"Hey?" Captain Elisha could scarcely believe he had heard correctly. "You can't go—to South Denboro?"

"No."

"Why not, for the land sakes? Come here! Let me look at you."

He took the young man by the arm and led him, almost by main strength, close to the lighted window of the station.

"Humph!" he grunted after a moment's scrutiny. "You've made up your mind; I can see that. Have you told Caroline? Does she know?"

Pearson smiled, but there was little mirth in the smile. "I think she agrees with me that it is best," he observed.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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